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SUBJECT: DEPUTY STEINBERG MEETS WITH UNAMI SRSG MELKERT TO
DISCUSS ELECTIONS, UN SECURITY, DIBS, ASHRAF, AND
IRAQ/KUWAIT

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B. B:09STATE79541

Classified By: IO ASSISTANT SECRETARY ESTHER BRIMMER
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Steinberg and UNAMI SRSG Ad Melkert both highlighted concern over foreign involvement in the elections and subsequent government formation. Melkert noted that he expects to work closely with the Government of Iraq (GOI) to support and advise positive government formation solutions, and does not envision violence derailing the electoral process. On the de-Baathification issue, he highlighted UNAMI's discrete role in stressing to the GOI the need for consistent and transparent grounds for exclusion. Based on his conversations with Sunni leaders, he felt that there will be no general Sunni boycott of the election. In April, the UN will release a needs assessment report that will lay out plans for logistics and security for UN personnel in Iraq in the near and long term. Melkert noted that UN security in Iraq will come with a high price tag, and accordingly, requested U.S. support, including lobbying one or two UN Member States to provide mobile security to UNAMI. On the disputed internal boundaries issue, Melkert expects UNAMI to be more active on this issue in the post-election period. On the Ashraf issue, the SRSG requested that a European country and the U.S. engage as key interlocutors between the GOI and Ashraf in order for the UN not to be "squeezed." Reviewing his recent visit to Kuwait, Melkert noted that he tried to set realistic expectations for the Kuwaitis, and highlighted the need for them to engage in order to make progress on Iraq/Kuwait Chapter VII. Melkert also noted that he was in listening mode, but came away believing that "something can be done" on the range of issues, including the maritime boundary after the elections.

ELECTIONS

12. (C) On February 18, Deputy Steinberg met with UNAMI SRSG Ad Melkert to discuss the upcoming Iraqi elections and subsequent government formation. Melkert noted his concern over the influence of Iran in Iraq and the possibility of out-of-country voting (OCV) fraud, particularly in Iran and Syria. This is especially true as OCV voters will self-identify in which districts they are voting - thereby potentially allowing for undue influence in swing districts. Melkert noted that Iran continues to press for influence in Iraq, but Iraq's political class, including the Shi'a are increasingly resisting such meddling. Deputy Steinberg noted that we share the UN's concerns about OCV fraud potential and Iranian efforts to influence the election and government formation thereafter. Domestically in Iraq, Melkert said the high number of polling stations (50,000), each with approximately 500 voters, made tampering more difficult than

with OCV voting, especially when each station must submit results immediately after the ballots are tallied. Moreover, Melkert noted that despite the small number of international observers, they will be positioned in locations where problems are most likely to occur. According to Melkert, "this should work out well, its important to have those eyes and ears in the right places." Melkert also highlighted UNAMI's work with IHEC on a electoral complaint mechanism.

¶13. (C) Focused on making progress in the post-election period, Melkert is planning to bring key Iraqi advisors together to work toward a more rapid and positive government formation than in 2005. In the run-up to national elections, UNAMI is working to ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to move the process as smoothly as possible. To this end, the SRSG met with Speaker Samarrai to discuss the possibility of a lapse in Iraqi Parliamentary authority. According to Melkert, Samarrai said he would worry about the problem when it came time to worry. Melkert worried such an attitude might create a power vacuum. Deputy Steinberg responded that he foresaw two potentially problematic scenarios that we need to help Iraq avoid - either a vacuum or an abuse of executive/government power. The Deputy noted that one issue Iraqis will need to deal with is the expiration of the Tripartite Presidency Council which has played a positive role in allowing all major sectarian groups to have their voices heard. This is especially true for the Sunnis, for whom the veto in the Council has been particularly important. Melkert mused that perhaps the GOI should consider a code of conduct on how the government should function during government formation and then after a new government is formed. This mechanism could be used to define the role of the president and vice-president(s), and thus preserve the basic features of the Presidency Council without altering the constitution.

¶14. (C) Although Melkert is concerned about violence in the run-up to elections, he opined that such violence, even spectacular incidents, would not derail the electoral process. UNAMI will assess the elections based on the full process, from preparation of candidate lists through the post-election complaints mechanism. Melkert also noted that to avoid differing voting blocs jumping to conclusions, no preliminary election results will be revealed until 30% of the results for each governorate are finalized.

¶15. (C) On the de-Baathification issue, Melkert noted that UNAMI has played a discrete role in the process, highlighting Iraq's sovereignty and its right to decide its own future. At the same time, UNAMI continues to stress to the GOI that grounds for exclusion must be as consistent and transparent as possible. Although Melkert noted that exclusions have changed the electoral climate, Sunni leaders have told him that there will be no general Sunni boycott of the election, despite the announcement the same day by Saleh al Mutlaq that he (and his party) would do so. In general, Sunni leaders have apparently learned from their experience in 2005 and said they would not boycott, according to Melkert.

UNAMI LOGISTICS AND SECURITY

¶16. (C) Melkert reported that he had a long conversation with Under Secretary General for Safety and Security Greg Starr on February 17 to discuss the future of UN logistics and security in Iraq. The UN is working on a specific needs assessment that will require another 4-6 weeks to complete. Reporting that the price tag will be substantial, Melkert asked the Deputy if he could count on the U.S. to support the costs. (Note: he did not specify whether the proposal sought assessed or voluntary contributions.) Melkert also asked for U.S. support to recruit one or two UN Member States to supply troops to provide mobile security for UNAMI as the U.S. military reduces its presence. He noted that this would require forces with more capability than the Fijians, who provide perimeter security at UNAMI compounds. USUN/W Erica Barks-Ruggles noted that we want UNAMI to have what it needs to continue to operate successfully, and would look carefully

at the needs assessment when it came forward. She and the Deputy noted the tough budget climate and our own significant costs increases for civilian mobility and security in Iraq, and made no promises on increasing budget. Melkert noted that he will prepare to brief on this issue in April, and also expressed concern that the UN's 5th Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) as a potential obstacle to overcome. Melkert also noted that although the Iraqis agreed to transfer \$25m to fund the UN Headquarters in Baghdad over six weeks ago, the SRSG is still "chasing" the GOI for the money.

DISPUTED INTERNAL BOUNDARIES (DIBS)

¶7. (C) Asked about the up-tick in recent incidents in disputed areas, Melkert assessed that the situation was not too bad, but that Nineva remained an issue. UNAMI expects to be more active on this issue in the post-election period.

CAMP ASHRAF

¶8. (C) On the situation at Camp Ashraf, Melkert noted that we should not expect much in the next couple weeks. He has continued to emphasize to the Iraqis not to push on the issue during the elections and immediate post-election period. Melkert also noted that although UNAMI will continue to help with the situation, he made clear he did not view this as primarily a UN responsibility. He recommended that a European country and the U.S. become key interlocutors between the GOI and Ashraf residents as the UN cannot take on this contentious issue with all the other processes it is responsible for leading with the government. Melkert wants to avoid precipitous GOI action, and assessed that politicians will have less incentive to act rashly after the elections. That said, Melkert's concern is to ensure that nothing happens, but realizes that Ashraf "is still an accident waiting to happen" and pressed for the U.S. not to let the accident happen before engaging.

IRAQ/KUWAIT ISSUES

¶9. (C) On Iraq/Kuwait, SRSG Melkert said he is in listening mode and plans to work to get something done after elections. Meeting with Melkert in late January, PM Maliki reaffirmed that the maritime issue is his primary concern. With this knowledge in hand, Melkert then traveled to Kuwait (January 26-28) where among a number of high-level meetings, he was briefed "very comprehensively" by the Kuwaiti Navy. According to Melkert, the Kuwaitis have produced a document on the history of naval cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait that demonstrates that the two countries can work well together around the border, and contains pictures that illustrate that the Iraqis also make the Kuwaitis raise its flag when entering Iraqi waters near Umm Qasr. Melkert intends to go back to the Iraqis after the elections and discuss the Khor Abdullah waterway's history in an effort to assuage Iraqi concerns over the maritime border. The Deputy asked Melkert how practical the Kuwaitis are in working towards a resolution of the range of Iraq/Kuwait issues, to which the SRSG responded, "something can be done."

END NOTE

¶10. (C) Melkert was pleased by the assignment of Robert Ford as the new U.S. Ambassador to Syria. The SRSG said of Ford, "he knows the issues and has been great to work with."

CLINTON